

JEWISH IDENTITY OF JEWISH DISCIPLES OF YESHUA

Four different fundamental perspectives

There is an important discussion among Jewish (Israeli) disciples of Yeshua on their Jewish identity. They seek to express - or at least to understand - their Jewish identity while serving Yeshua the Messiah. There are four different fundamental perspectives, as follows:

- 1) Primary emphasis on the principle that “There is no difference between Jew and Gentile in the Messiah Yeshua.”
- 2) Maintenance of Jewish identity through Torah observance, which remains obligatory according to the teachings of Yeshua.
- 3) Maintenance of Jewish identity through adoption of the rabbinic tradition of the people of Israel.
- 4) Independent application of Jewish traditions, according to the leading of the Spirit of God.

You can read about this in *Zot Habrit*, September 2007 English Issue No. 6, Part One. (page 7 - 25) at [http://www.mjai.co.il/UserFiles/File/Zot%20habrit%206%20en\(1\).pdf](http://www.mjai.co.il/UserFiles/File/Zot%20habrit%206%20en(1).pdf)

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The Seminar's Inception

Boaz Fastman

Approximately six months ago, Menahem Benhayim¹ approached me and expressed his opinion that one of the goals of the Alliance should be the stimulation of lively discussion on topics which are unique to Jewish believers in Yeshua the Messiah, particularly topics with which Jewish Israeli disciples of Yeshua wrestle as they seek to suitably express their Jewish identity while serving Yeshua the Messiah.

With these thoughts in mind, we decided to integrate a seminar and open discussion on the topic, "Our Jewish Identity in the Messiah Yeshua," into the upcoming annual meeting of the Alliance. The executive committee of the Alliance attempted to outline the predominant perspectives existing in the Land regarding our Jewish identity in the Messiah Yeshua. In other words, they set out to determine the different views in the Land concerning the ways in which a Messianic Jew ought to express his Jewish identity while following Yeshua the Messiah. Expression of Jewish identity is a central issue for Jewish Israeli believers, and it is clear to all that existing opinions on this seminar topic are numerous, divergent and at times even polarized. After discussion, we came to the conclusion that there are four different fundamental perspectives, as follows:

- 1) Primary emphasis on the principle that "There is no difference between Jew and Gentile in the Messiah Yeshua."
- 2) Maintenance of Jewish identity through Torah observance, which remains obligatory according to the teachings of Yeshua.
- 3) Maintenance of Jewish identity through adoption of the rabbinic tradition of the people of Israel.
- 4) Independent application of Jewish traditions, according to the leading of the Spirit of God.

The next stage involved turning to fellow believers who represented each

1) Menahem Benhayim went to be with the Lord on July 4th, 2004. See Gershon Nerel, "Menahem Benhayim (1924-2004) – In Memoriam," *Zot Habrit*, vol. 20, October 2004, pp. 1-3 (Hebrew).

perspective, and receiving their consent to present their perspective on the subject. The leaders who agreed to speak, according to the order of perspectives mentioned above, are: Eitan Kashtan, Gershon Nerel, Joseph Shulam and Eitan Shishkoff. We emphasized the need for presentations that would encourage willingness to listen to one another and stimulate serious, mutually respectful discussion.

The Seminar

Some 80 people attended the seminar, held at Moshav Yad Hashmona, from differing backgrounds and different congregations across the country. Hanan Lukatz, chairman of the Alliance, encouraged those present to respectfully address the speakers and maintain a good-natured discussion. The seminar itself was divided into three parts: the first, consecutive twenty-minute presentations by the speakers on each of the four perspectives; the second, audience questions and comments directed to the speakers; and lastly, time for the speakers' responses and open discussion.

The seminar was very interesting and was held in a respectful manner, which testifies to the increasing maturity of the believers in the Land in their

ability to listen and respectfully treat fellow believers who hold different and even polarized views on the same subject. The impression at the end of the seminar was that the various perspectives generally complemented one another, placing emphases on different aspects of the Scriptures and faith in Yeshua the Messiah. The seminar lasted approximately two and one half hours, and was recorded in its entirety. We have provided a summary of the speakers' presentations below (as they were presented to us in writing), and the discussion held thereafter.

It is our hope that the content of the materials presented in this issue will help us to further crystallize our understanding and perspective regarding the expression of our Jewish identity in the Messiah Yeshua.



Messianism Equals Judaism

Eitan Kashtan

Jewish identity in the Messiah. So many words are spoken and written on this subject. It is strange that the first Messianics debated the totally opposite question: “What is the identity of the Gentile in the Messiah?”

Not a single one of the first believers thought for even a moment that his Messianism cancelled his Judaism.¹ On the contrary, they saw in Messianism as represented by Yeshua, and later by the apostles, the incarnation of Judaism. So what happened? How is it that we are drawn time and again to defend our Judaism? How has it happened that to those around us, and even, to my great sorrow, to us, it appears that we have adopted the faith of the Gentiles, within which we need to try to maintain our Judaism? If we were all confident in our Jewish identity, maybe we wouldn't continually busy ourselves saying, “We're Jews! We're Jews!” Brothers and sisters, in order to understand our Jewish identity it is worthwhile to define Judaism for ourselves. Is Judaism what the rabbis represent today? Is Judaism what the

rabbis represented during the Mishnaic period? Is Judaism the Torah of Moses alone? Is Judaism the Old Covenant alone? Does Judaism attribute greater authority to a particular section of the Holy Scriptures? Or is Judaism the true, pure faith in the God of Israel according to His Word as expressed in

Not a single one of the first believers thought for even a moment that his Messianism cancelled his Judaism

the Old and New Covenants? Judaism was almost never what the leaders of the people claimed it was. Those who adopted the ways of the priests, Hophni and Phinehas, rather than drawing near to Judaism, distanced themselves from it. Whoever offered sacrifices according to the Torah of Moses but whose heart was far from God was less “Jewish” than the one who loved God with all his heart. In the days of Jeremiah, while it was true that the people practiced the notable commandments of the Torah, yet God could scarcely find even one individual who actually “seeks truth” (Jeremiah 5:1). God determines that if He could find one such individual, He would forgive Jerusalem.

Isaiah lamented Israel fasting according to the laws of the Torah but not caring for the weak. The focus of Judaism was never ritual but rather the

1) Let the reader please keep in mind that traditionally there is no distinction in Hebrew between “Judaism”, “Jewishness”, and, at times, “Jewry”. These English concepts are expressed in the single Hebrew word ‘Yahadut’ which is translated “Judaism” in this section.

love of God and walking in the ways that He prescribed.

I am not making light of God's commandments, but the point is that true Judaism is total submission to His Word, and to His Word alone!

Accordingly, if God determined that Yeshua is the Messiah, then to believe in the Messiah is true Judaism! If our faith, that which we call Messianism, faithfully represents God's will and His Word, then our faith is Jewish. What I am saying here was so clear two thousand years ago. The question asked at that time dealt with the identity of the Gentiles that joined the Jews by serving God in the Messiah. How can a Gentile serve the God of Israel? Isaiah (ch. 46) already spoke of this when he said that any Gentile who believes in the God of Israel joins the people of Israel as an equal. Not whoever takes upon himself the tradition of Israel, not whoever undergoes a "halachic conversion," not whoever wears a yarmulke and says the *Shmoneh Esrei* prayer, but whoever loves the God of Israel and walks in His ways.

Therefore, the question is not Jewish identity in the Messiah, which is perfectly clear and is derived from the Holy Scriptures and from them alone. The question is how should a Messianic live, whether he be a Jew or a non-Jew. The question is not if we are obligated to keep the traditions of Israel, which of course we are not.

The question is not even if we are required to keep the commandments of the Torah, an issue which is more than sufficiently addressed in the New Covenant. Whoever thinks that we are obligated to keep the Torah, needs to essentially negate the authority of the Epistle to the Galatians, the Epistle to the Hebrews, extensive selections from the Epistle to the Romans, and more. The Holy Scriptures clearly state that Messianics, Jews and Gentiles alike, inherit the promise that God gave to Abraham. The Holy Scriptures clearly state that Messianics, Jews and Gentiles alike, are forgiven through the atonement of the Messiah when they repent. There is no difference between Jewish and Gentile believer in Jesus, and it is



forbidden for there to be a difference. The partition between Jews and Gentiles was removed at great expense by the blood of the Messiah and we are forbidden to rebuild it.

Still we must ask another question: Do we as Jews and as Israelis in any way express our past or our national heritage in the framework of our service of God? Of course we do, since we are who we are. Therefore we celebrate the New Year and Hanukkah, not as a religious obligation before God, but

as part of our national identification with the people of Israel, just as we celebrate Independence Day. I don't expect a Japanese believer to celebrate Hanukkah or to participate in a

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Passover seder. We do this because we are Jews living in Israel, not as a religious obligation. For this reason we should not judge one another, because we have freedom in the Messiah. Whoever wishes may celebrate the holidays of the Torah as he pleases, just as whosoever wishes may keep kosher. But we are forbidden to force our opinion on someone else. There is no scriptural basis to say that a Messianic Jew has certain obligations that differ from those of a non-Jewish Messianic, so we must be wary not to discriminate against the non-Jew. Perhaps one more point: many argue that we should behave as Jews in order to reach our people. Many say that visitors will feel at ease if our services include motifs that recall the synagogue. If so, the opposite position is correct. Many times religious organizations accuse us of misleading our audiences. We try to look and to sound like religious Jews and to call for faith in the Messiah.

Brothers and sisters, the news of the Messiah is good, and is not in need of adornment. Whoever hears the gospel needs to distinguish the difference, and this difference should be emphasized. True Judaism is not the prayer shawl and the yarmulke but rather the New Covenant in the blood of the Messiah, a covenant that unites all of the believers without partiality.

This uniting covenant, the New Covenant that Jeremiah describes, is a covenant made by God with Israel, who in His grace has afforded the Gentiles an opportunity to become partners. Thus those who were "far off," i.e. the Gentiles, have been "brought near by the blood of Messiah" and all have become "fellow citizens" (Ephesians 2). The Gentiles that have joined this covenant were grafted in against nature as Shaul (Paul) the apostle describes in his Epistle to the Romans (11:11-24). This is the greatness of the gospel, the greatness of Judaism, the greatness of Messianism.

If we were to use the proper terminology, we would say that the Jewish faith and the Messianic faith are one. Therefore, being a Messianic Jew is the most natural thing on earth, and one has no need to search out his identity, which is deeply embedded in his faith. As for the Gentiles, they may explore their national identity as those who have joined the Jewish faith.

The Torah is Obligatory in Light of the Words of Yeshua

Gershon Nerel

The theological and national identity of Jews who believe in Yeshua is not a theoretical question. In everyday life we are required to relate to this subject on a personal and familial level as well as in the framework of our congregations. Our starting point regarding our Jewish identity usually revolves around the keeping of the Torah. Our Lord Yeshua already said in the ‘Sermon on the Mount’: “Do not think that I came to destroy the Torah or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or tittle will by no means pass from the Torah till all is fulfilled” (Matthew 5:17-18). In principle, the Torah of Moses and the Pentateuch are still valid and even binding upon us. On the other hand, we are not “legalists,” and do not see in the Torah “laws” which have the final say in spiritual matters. In matters of interpretation and spiritual direction, the highest and ultimate authority from our standpoint are the words of Yeshua the Messiah, the Son of God, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit.



The central question is how are we to keep the Torah - according to the Orthodox Rabbinic Halacha, or the Reform-Conservative, or to actually pave a unique and independent path of our own? Set before us is the challenge to walk in an old-new way, the way of the Jewish followers of Yeshua of the first century in Israel, as described in the New Covenant. At the same time, we must also take into account the last two thousand years of history. We must explain the fact that in terms of atonement for sin and the salvation of souls, there is no difference between Jew and non-Jew. We must clarify, however, that there is indeed a distinct and legitimate Jewish identity for those that belong to the people of Israel.

Below are a number of practical examples of how we keep the Torah from our perspective, and thus express our Jewish identity:

1. We observe the law of circumcision (Genesis 17:10).
2. We observe the Sabbath and the holidays according to the biblical calendar (Leviticus 23).
3. We keep kosher according to the principle “You shall not boil a young goat in its mother’s milk” (Exodus 23:19, 34:26).
4. We do not “harm the edges” of our beards (Leviticus 19:27).

Of course there are many facets to this subject, however the ‘key’ for us is how to distinguish between the essence and the minutiae. The answer lies in the principle that the New Covenant is the key to understanding the Old Covenant, and the Old Covenant is the basis for understanding the New Covenant. In other words, Yeshua’s instruction is the key for keeping the Torah,

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such as observation of the Sabbath - not on Sunday as in churches - and according to the principle that “it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath” (Matthew 12:12), and “The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27). Accordingly, when the Lord Yeshua said: “You have heard it said to the ancients... but I say to you...” He was positioning

himself as a reformer of the Torah, and as One who, in contrast to the Torah of Moses, for example, unequivocally forbade divorce (Matthew 5:31-32). It is perfectly clear to us that Yeshua Himself is the One who gave the Torah at Mount Sinai, and He is also the One who has the authority to explain, reform and amend it.

As Jewish followers of Yeshua, we are not subject to the Oral Torah, and we do not need to keep the traditions and customs of the rabbis. For example:

1. We do not keep the rabbinic *halacha* regarding the separation of milk and meat.
2. We are not required to wear a yarmulke.
3. We do not have to light Sabbath and Hanukkah candles.
4. We do not need to celebrate Purim, and certainly not as carnivalesque and clowning in the congregation.

Nevertheless, since today to some degree the rabbis “sit in the seat of Moses” (Matthew 23:1), we are not prohibited from receiving “general services” from the rabbinic establishment, such as:

1. Professional *Mohels* (Ritual Circumcisers).
2. Rabbinic Marriage - if and when the rabbis are prepared to marry us.
3. *Hevrat Kaddisha* (Ritual Burial Services) - if and when the rabbis are prepared to bury our dead.

Our problem today concerns the worldview and definition of “Messianic Judaism,” which in actuality creates confusion and even internal contradictions, and not only from a semantic point-of-view. Chabadniks (Lubavitsch Hassidim), for example, along with other Messianists, like the followers of Rabbi Nahman from Ouman (Breslau), also speak of “Messianic Judaism.”

What is the definition of ‘Judaism’? It is a fact that secular Jewishness (and even secular Orthodoxy) exists, so there is actually a need to differentiate between Jewry and Judaism.

The problem that I see is that the “Messianic Judaism” of today, with its over-emphasis on the Law and tradition (for the most part, Eastern European tradition), takes center stage at the expense of the gospel of the Kingdom of God and the words of Yeshua. What I have

seen of today's "Messianic Judaism," with its confused "Messianic *Halacha*," reflects a situation of distorted proportions. It is our obligation to focus on the words of Yeshua himself. We are to remember well what Yeshua said regarding the rabbis and scribes, as follows:

Only in the State of Israel can we express our Jewish identity without need for Halacha and rabbinic tradition

"You shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for you neither go in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in" (Matthew 23:13).

"You travel land and sea to win one proselyte, and when he is won, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves" (Matthew 23:15).

"Blind guides, fools and hypocrites" (Matthew 23).

"Woe to you lawyers! For you have taken away the key of knowledge. You did not enter in yourselves, and those who were entering in you hindered" (Luke 11:52).

Only in the State of Israel can we express our Jewish identity without need for *Halacha* and rabbinic tradition. The Hebrew language which we use, keeping the Sabbath and the Jewish holidays as is customary according to the calendar adopted by the State, and the fact that we live out our daily lives here in Israel – for example in government schools

and the military – all enable us to identify with the people of Israel, and express our identity as Jews and as an inseparable part of the people. Therefore, my conclusion is that, in particular, "American Messianic Judaism" serves the purposes of those Messianic Jews that prefer to remain in the countries of Diaspora, and refuse to make aliyah to Israel under various pretexts. In the Diaspora, Messianic Jews develop "Messianic Halacha" in order to preserve and perpetuate the state of Diaspora. In the Land of Israel, we do not need this kind of American import.

In conclusion, as Israeli Jews, our theology and nationalism is anchored in the Old and New Covenants alone, and just as we do not need to belong to an extremist political party in order to prove our loyalty to Israel, so we also do not need to adopt diasporic traditions in order to feel and state that we are part of this people. The High Court judges in Israel have by their ruling already removed us from the community of Israel – solely because of our faith in Yeshua. Therefore, keeping rabbinical traditions and the compilation of a "Messianic rabbinical *Halacha*" are not what will help us integrate into our people. Only in the State of Israel, after two thousand years of Diaspora, can Jewish followers of Yeshua live as Jews outside of the rabbinic halachic establishment.

(In the ideas shared above, I am following in the footsteps of *Haim Joseph Haimoff* (Bar-David 1905-1991), who for decades paved a unique path for disciples of Yeshua in the Land of Israel.)

First Century Jewish Identity as a Model

Joseph Shulam

Introduction

Every person has a variety of identities, particularly their personal and national identities. Neither of the two offers a lot of room for maneuvering, despite the fact that since the Enlightenment in Europe and the Declaration of Independence in the United States, there is a strong feeling in the West that identity is a private issue, open to free choice any time of the day or night. In fact, a person's identity is primarily determined by his national, cultural, ethnic, linguistic and faith affiliations. Most of these affiliations are attributed to a person, regardless of his personal preferences, before he ever draws his first breath.

Imagine a tall, blond, blue-eyed man enters this auditorium and in a perfectly clear voice declares: "I am a black African." I have no doubt that all the eyes in the room will raise their eyebrows in bewilderment and interpretations will begin to circulate, such as: "He only thinks that he is black!" "Maybe he was born in Africa and his parents gave him the name 'Black'." "Perhaps he's impersonating a black person?" "He's only teasing us!" However, it would be clear to all of us that regarding the question of identity, here we are talking about something peculiar and irregular.

The Bible recognizes the identity of the people of Israel as the people of God

Every person has different types of identity:

- a) His national identity, which is usually not acquired: a child who is taken from his parents in infancy and raised by strangers acquires the identity of his adoptive parents and the place where he is raised.
- b) One's personal identity is given to acquisition and change. For example, a person may study a profession and add another characteristic to his identity. A son is born to a man and he becomes a father, thus acquiring another characteristic of his identity and even a new name. A person receives a doctorate from university and his identity changes, etc.

An individual's personal identity derives from the following sources:

- a) The history that a person shares in common with his environment, including culture, language, and national and personal vision.
- b) The public opinion that shapes the character and behavioral patterns of the individual.

c) The willingness of a person to live in society and participate in community life and the personal sacrifice of the group to which he belongs. This might be the Lutheran, Methodist or Catholic Church or perhaps Islam, Buddhism or Judaism. A person's professional association, his guild, also attributes identity to a person; at times even the clothes that he wears are part of his identity.

The National Identity of the People of God in the Holy Scriptures

The Bible recognizes the identity of the people of Israel as the people of God. In no place in the Old or New Covenants is there a divesting of the Israeli nation from their position as the people of God – in the past, the present, or the future. The same principle applies to all of the Land of Israel, and particularly to Jerusalem. The national identity of “God’s people” is always Israel. It remains Israel in the New Covenant and also at the second coming of the Messiah. According to the prophecies, the return of the Messiah is a return to Israel, the people of Israel and to Jerusalem. The Gentiles join the people of Israel. In the parable of the olive tree, the Gentiles are grafted

on to the natural, cultivated tree, but not in place of the pruned and burnt branches.

Jewish identity should be

Jewish identity should be defined by the Jewish People and not by a group of Gentile missionaries disguising themselves as Jews

defined by the Jewish People and not by a group of Gentile missionaries disguising themselves as Jews. A person cannot say that he is a “carpenter” if he has never held a hammer, nail, saw or awl in his life. If a person has never in his life made a bureau or wardrobe or table or door or any other thing that carpenters make in their daily labor, he cannot call himself a “carpenter.” The Apostle Shaul, in a biting argument with his opponents, said: “But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Messiah. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Messiah Yeshua my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Messiah” (Philippians 3:7-8). But at the same time, he knew who he was and his identity: “I was circumcised on the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew

of Hebrews; concerning the Torah, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the Torah, blameless” (Philippians 3:5-6).

I am not opposed to my Gentile brothers having their own identity, their own culture, and a style of worship that differs from mine, and even that they be Pentecostals, Lutherans, Baptists, or Afro-Americans. But as for me, the most important thing is the fact that the first congregation in Jerusalem, as described in the pages of the New Covenant, was a Messianic Jewish congregation, which was 100% faithful to our Lord Yeshua and 100% faithful to the Torah of Israel. By the same measure, Shaul the apostle was totally faithful to the Lord Yeshua, who revealed Himself to him on the road to Damascus, and also 100% faithful to the Torah of Moses and Israel.



Please refer to the following selections from the New Covenant Scriptures:

1. Matthew 5:17-20: “Do not think that I came to destroy the Torah or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the Torah till all is fulfilled. Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.”
2. 1 Corinthians 7:17-20: “But as God has distributed to each one, as the Lord has called each one, so let him walk. And so I ordain in all the congregations. Was anyone called while circumcised? Let him not become uncircumcised. Was anyone called while uncircumcised? Let him not be circumcised. Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing, but keeping the commandments of God is what matters. Let each one remain in the same calling in which he was called.”
3. Acts 21: 17-24: “And when we had come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly. On the following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present. When he had greeted them, he told in detail those things which God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. And when they heard it, they glorified the Lord. And they said to him, ‘You see, brother, how many myriads of Jews there are who have believed, and they are all zealous for the Torah; but they have been informed about you

that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children nor walk according to the customs. What then? The assembly must certainly meet, for they will hear that you have come. Therefore do what we tell you: We have four men who have taken a vow. Take them and be purified with them, and pay their expenses so that they may shave their heads, and that all may know that those things of which they were informed concerning you are nothing, but that you yourself also walk orderly and keep the Torah.”

The most important thing is the fact that the first congregation in Jerusalem, as described in the pages of the New Covenant, was a Messianic Jewish congregation, which was 100% faithful to our Lord Yeshua and 100% faithful to the Torah of Israel

4. Acts 24: 14-18: “But this I confess to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect, so I worship the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the Torah and in the Prophets. I have hope in God, which they themselves also accept, that there will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust. This being so, I myself always strive to have a conscience without offense toward God and men. Now after many years, I came to bring alms and offerings to my nation, in the midst of which some Jews from Asia found me purified in the temple, neither with a mob nor with tumult.”
5. Acts 28: 17: “And it came to pass after three days that Paul called the leaders of the Jews together. So when they had come together, he said to them: ‘Men and brethren, though I have done nothing against our people or the customs of our fathers, yet I was delivered as a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans.’”

From Mount Sinai to the Upper Room

Eitan Shishkoff

In order to fully express God's intent for Messianic Jewish life, we are called to maintain a spiritual harmony, which incorporates Torah celebration with the fullness of the Holy Spirit.

Reflection upon Biblical Examples. How does God intend to achieve this harmony of Law and Spirit? What is His plan? Here we are again, Messianic Jews in the Land of Israel. Do we have an example of the authority of the Spirit operating in a congregation grounded in the Torah? Yes, certainly - the first congregation of Messianic Jews in the Book of Acts. Yet, as Jews, we still find our roots in the Torah. So we must ask, "Does this concept of Spirit-empowered living exist in the Torah?" In other words, is there an example of a community that, while rooted in the Torah, demonstrates the power of the Holy Spirit? Yes - our powerful encounter with the sublime One who is above

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all, at Mount Sinai.

These two events essentially parallel one another in an awesome way and constitute the basis for the perspective represented here. Emphasis on the Torah (the written letter, the holidays, in a Jewish-historical context) without the operation of the Spirit of God (the power of the gifts of the Spirit, free worship, Holy Spirit-anointed preaching, teaching and testimony) leads to dryness and narrow legalism.

On the other hand, emphasis on the power of the Holy Spirit without application of the Torah as a foundation for biblical Jewish identity, leads to an ungrounded spiritualism that is irrespective of the balance inherent in Scripture, and a disassociation with Israel as a people.

1. Mount Sinai: Leviticus 19: 16-20

- a. Revelation of God's truth through the written letter, a catalogue of laws.
- b. Demonstration of the supernatural power of God.
- c. The establishment and formation of the people of God on earth.

d. Paving a path for coming generations.

2. Jerusalem – “The Upper Room”: Acts 2: 1-16

- a. Took place on the day of the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai.
- b. Demonstration of supernatural power (the sound of a rushing wind, speaking in tongues).
- c. The establishment and formation of the first congregation of Yeshua.
- d. Paving a path for coming generations.

At Congregation *Ohalei Rachamim* (“Tents of Mercy”), we have experienced the blessing of the hand of God as we have celebrated the holidays of the Torah together and in our homes. At the same time, we seek the active involvement of the Holy Spirit by adopting the gifts of the New Covenant and fostering an open spirit of worship. I believe that the God of Israel always intended for these elements to be expressed in complete harmony, as in the two historical examples of Mount Sinai and Jerusalem. In the Book of Acts, the community of Messianic Jews was divided into two camps similar in essence to today’s body of believers in Israel: traditional-religious and secular-Jewish with Greco-Roman influence. Their strength and impact were realized through the same elements that we seek to adopt in the expression of our faith today:



- ❖ Yeshua was preached openly as the Messiah primarily through the living testimonies of the disciples.
- ❖ The Word of God was spread from house to house and the Torah was honored.
- ❖ The power of the Holy Spirit was demonstrated through answers to prayers.
- ❖ Material assistance for the needy was freely given.
- ❖ Apostolic teams were sent out to new regions in order to plant new congregations.

May God help us to reclaim the dynamism of the first-century pioneers, rooted in the covenant and the blessing of God, as we labor in the plentiful harvest. Yeshua was with them in His Holy Spirit in an electrifying way. They were the ones who provided us with the model of Messianic Jewish life in the Land of Israel.

Questions and Answers, Comments and Responses

Questions and Answers

Zellah Goldberg

(Question directed at Joseph Shulam):

If to be Jewish is an issue of history, personally, my background is from Colorado in the United States, but my identity is certainly here and there are certainly many others like me. So where do we stand?

Joseph Shulam (Answer):

You have joined the people of Israel, like my wife. You raised your children here and your children served in the military. You live here. Many American Messianic Jews that made *aliyah* since you have been here have returned to Colorado, to the United States and to other places. What I have to say to you and to people like you is: Welcome. Thank God that in the blood of Yeshua the Messiah you have joined the people of Israel. You who are from the nations of the world that have joined the people of Israel have a double blessing, like Ruth the Moabitess and Rahab and Naaman who discovered the God of Israel and served the God of Israel. May there be many more like you. Everyone who does his part and casts his lot with the Land of Israel and the people of Israel is 100% a part of the people. It is forbidden to say to a sincere proselyte¹

or to a partial proselyte according to *Halacha* that he is a proselyte at all, and in the Torah it says: “One Torah shall be for you and the stranger who dwells among you.” Therefore it is forbidden to discriminate or differentiate, particularly since Yeshua shed His blood for the whole world.

Zvi Sadan (Question):

What about “Israel according to the flesh,” an expression used by Paul? None of the speakers explicitly addressed this subject. What was mentioned was that whoever doesn’t live like a Jew is not a Jew.

Joseph Shulam (Answer):

There are three *dimensions* to our being Jews. The first dimension is according to the flesh. A Jewish baby that is kidnapped and raised with Bedouin, for example, doesn’t know that he is Jewish, but as soon as he discovers his real identity, he is obligated to return to his people. A Jew that doesn’t know that he is a Jew still remains a Jew. That is Jewish according to the flesh. The second dimension is the Jew who knows that he is Jewish but nonetheless denies his Jewishness.

1) The words “proselyte” and “stranger” in

this context are both translations of the same Hebrew word: “Ger.”

He knowingly does not want to keep anything that recalls Judaism, and yet nonetheless, he is a Jew. "Israel despite his sin remains Israel." The third dimension is the Jew that knows that he is a Jew, reads the Scriptures and is filled with the Holy Spirit and believes that Yeshua is the Messiah, and commits to do God's will according to the Word of God. In my lecture I spoke of this Jew and not of the Jew according to the flesh or the Jew that is held captive and compelled by others to act against his will. I spoke of the Jew that believes in Yeshua the Messiah and has been immersed in water, born again and committed himself to obey God. This Jew must live as a Jew according to the Word of God and not according to the tradition of various churches.



we believe in Yeshua, they will say that we are Christians. I don't suggest that we call ourselves Christians, of course not. I think that the emphasis needs to be more on faith and walking in the Holy Spirit.

Joseph Shulam (Response):

It is true that Yeshua performed miracles on the Sabbath and cast out demons on the Sabbath. If you read the Rambam or "Shulhan Arukh," or any other source about what Yeshua did on the Sabbath, you will not find any prohibition

against these things. So why did they criticize Yeshua so much? Because there were always extremists among the ultra-Orthodox and among the Christians that didn't understand the Scriptures. Yeshua didn't commit a single violation or break a single commandment, and did not teach others to violate the Torah, and that is the basis for His being the Messiah. If Yeshua had violated the Torah and He were sinful, He wouldn't be the Messiah. And regarding the issue of people not accepting our Judaism even if we dress like ultra-Orthodox, it simply doesn't matter, and it is also not true. I studied four years in an ultra-Orthodox yeshiva and the rabbi knew that I believed in Yeshua. In our congregation and Bible college (*Midrasha*) there are unbelieving ultra-Orthodox rabbis teaching with full knowledge that they are teaching Messianic Jews and they have no problem. The problem is generated in three areas: if they think that we are dishonest and trying to ensnare Jews and teach them against the Torah, then they are angry, that's

Comments and Responses

Efrat Gerlich

(Comment directed to Joseph Shulam):

We can keep the commandments but are not obligated to do so. It is not our foundation. The Jew Simon Peter had a vision in which he saw unclean animals that God had purified. Here is a good example of how the commandments of the Torah are not binding. Yeshua, Himself, intentionally chose to perform miracles, healings and wonders on the Sabbath. I agree with Eitan Kashtan that commented that if we pretend to be good Jews, then supposedly people would accept us. Even if we dress like the ultra-Orthodox and act like them and say that

clear. If we do not sincerely keep the Torah, they are angry. And also if we do not accept them just as Christianity rejected them. They simply don't trust us. We don't project identification and trust.

Menahem Benhayim:

“The counsel of the Lord stands forever, the plans of His heart to all generations” (Psalm 33: 11). This important verse serves to balance the various things that were said. God works even well after our generation is gone, and we are only a small part in the workings of God among the people of Israel. All of us are in need of a little humility and modesty to understand that we don't know everything and nonetheless we are involved in everything. Let us try to understand that all of the disagreements and different perspectives are only part of the counsel of God in His restoration of the people of Israel to their national and Messianic roots. I do not hate the churches; I love the churches. I know that there are a lot of things in them that are not good, just as there are a lot of things that are not good in the synagogue, and I love the synagogue, yes. God used the synagogue to preserve the existence of the people of Israel, and He is still preserving us. Many secular people want to assimilate and to rid themselves of this burden of being ‘The Chosen People’. There are also many true-to-the-faith Christians who nonetheless hold to the view that our role as the chosen people has ended. We need to honor them and their contribution, but also the contribution of our people, including the religious sector, and to



disagree. Yeshua, who embodied the perfect love of God, criticized His people just as the prophets did. We also need to find this balance: boundless love, which includes criticism. This is the most difficult challenge we have in dealing with one another, coming from many different backgrounds.

Marcus Brodsky:

As the spiritual sons of Abraham, let us pay attention to two passages in Genesis 26: 4-5 (the Word of God to Isaac): “And I will make your descendants multiply as the stars of heaven; I will give to your descendants all these lands; and in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed; because Abraham obeyed My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws.” We see that Abraham kept the commandments of God even before the giving of the Torah. What does this say to us?

Yoram Mizrachi:

We first of all want our people to recognize us. In order for them to recognize us, the Messianic Jews, we need to be united and of one accord amongst ourselves. Another problematic issue is that there are different organizations in the Land that are committed to all kinds of organizations abroad because they receive contributions from them. They want to look nice and good, and to adopt the doctrines of the organization from abroad and bring it to the Land. Do we need to look good before God or before

the organization that is giving us money? I grew up in the Land in a traditional family and most of my friends from my neighborhood are traditional. The moment that I stop celebrating the holidays and say that it is permissible to eat all things, they will say that I am not a Jew, that is for certain. How do we expect our people to accept our Jewishness if we leave the Jewish tradition? I know that there are congregations that celebrate Christmas, and if you celebrate Passover they say: What, are you still sticking with the traditions?! We need to be more united in our perspective on the holidays and the traditions of Israel.

Michael Greenspan:

There are Chinese who are Baptists, for example, and they have remained good Chinese who are faithful to their people and their traditions. Why can't a Jew remain a good Jew, faithful to his Land and his people, and still be a Baptist or a Lutheran or a Presbyterian because he sees in them a good understanding of the Scriptures?

Evan Thomas (Question):

What about Jewishness according to the flesh? There is a problem with the new wave of immigrants from the former Soviet states. In Russia, many of the Jews grew up as secular people for all intents and purposes, without any observance of Judaism. They were nonetheless seen as Jews, in every sense of the word,

while here in the Land they are thought of as Russians who are barely Jewish.

Responses and Concluding Statements by the Main Speakers

Eitan Kashtan:

This is true; Abraham kept the Commandments of God before the giving of the Torah. This is not the question. I have already stated before that we are to keep the commandments of God. I said that this is Judaism, to keep the commandments of God, and this is our identity. When we want to maintain the identity of our people, what are we essentially speaking about? To keep the Jewish identity of the ultra-Orthodox who serve in the military or perhaps the ultra-Orthodox who do not serve in the military? Or to maintain the identity of the 80% of our people who are secular, and do not believe in God? If I am a Jew, no one can take my Jewishness away from me. We have reached the point of absurdity. Whoever doesn't believe that there is a God at all is a good Jew, but the one who believes in the Messiah of Israel has been made into a non-Jew only because he observes his faith in a particular way or eats in a certain manner. What kind of nonsense is this?! How can we place ourselves in a position like this? I am a Jew because I was born a Jew and more than that, because I inherit the promise of Abraham. That's what makes me a Jew. Regarding the keeping of tradition or the Torah, we spoke



of this earlier. There is freedom. I also agree with Gershon that we need to keep the Torah as Yeshua and the apostles taught us, and they gave us a measure of freedom. Shaul the apostle said that one regards one day and another regards another day. The New Covenant is the book that gives us the way today, so let's stick to it. What is forbidden, we will all forbid, and what is permitted, we will all permit, and let each one make his own decision about from what he is to abstain (where he has been given freedom to do so). A last comment: Calvin, Luther and others, despite our reservations which were mentioned earlier, and I agree with them, they are still good exegetes, so don't dismiss them with the wave of a hand. They are our brothers in the Messiah and there are things to be learned from them, even though their writings have no authority because only the Scriptures have authority over us. Rashi and Ibn Ezra were also outstanding exegetes and very wise. Their writings also have no authority over us, and also from them one can learn. Only remember that those that we so much want to embrace are not our brothers in the Messiah. Let us not disparage any exegesis simply because it comes from the Church. It may be that we have something to learn from them nonetheless.

Gershon Nerel:

Regarding the point that we should come together in humility and modesty, I



agree with Menahem. And in this context, we need to approach the Church at large in humility and modesty, since the Church is responsible for the canonization of the New Covenant, and we rely upon the New Covenant as a *fait accompli*. None of us is about to institute a different canonization or to determine that additional texts need to be added to the Canon. From this perspective, we give credit to the Church without accepting its traditions or its anti-Semitism.

Eitan Shishkoff:

We have things to learn from our Gentile believing brothers. There is no such thing as a Messianic Jew who is not influenced in one way or another by a Messianic movement or some form of Christianity, and this is not something to be ashamed of. It would actually be a shame if we Messianic Jews didn't know how to learn from our non-Jewish brothers.

* * *

Hanan Lukatz Concluded and summarized the discussion with a passage that was on his heart: "For in the Messiah Yeshua neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love" (Galatians 5:6).

Thank God for the faith that He has given us, the saving faith. Let everyone live by faith and the conviction that he is living accordingly, and let all these things be done in love.